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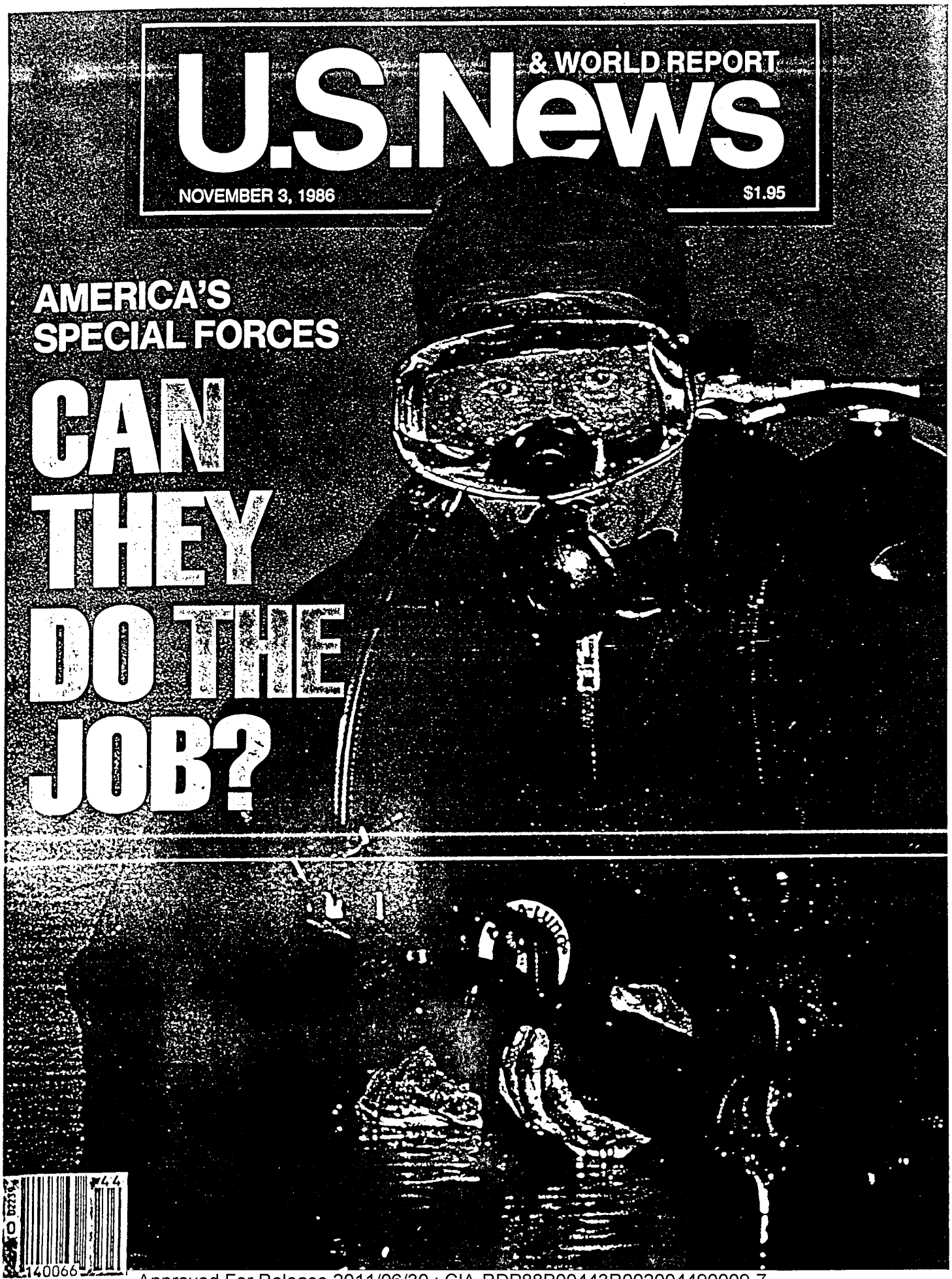
AMERICA'S SPECIAL FORCES

CAN THEY DO THE JOB?



Whose war is it? Nobody owns up

Nicaragua's U.S. prisoner talks a lot, knows less. As the debate goes on, it becomes moot: Aid to the *contras* again is legal

Managua

■ Eugene Hasenfus, on trial for supplying arms to U.S.-backed *contra* rebels, is not a heroically silent soldier of fortune. "Look, fellows, this ain't my war," he insisted to Sandinista captors after his plane was shot down inside Nicaragua. Actually, the hapless mercenary had the job of kicking supplies out the rear of the plane. As a minor player, he tried but was hardly able to answer the larger question, "Then whose war is it?"

For days after his capture—and possibly in response to pressure—Hasenfus detailed one allegation after another implicating the Central Intelligence Agency, Vice President George Bush and the governments of El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras in a shadowy arms-supply operation that Congress intended to outlaw in 1984. Documents from the downed plane and leaks to journalists have only sharpened questions on the role of senior U.S. officials. One suggestion is that some may have gone beyond well-known support for legal U.S. "humanitarian" aid and for privately funded arms shipments to facilitate the flow of arms until Congress resumed military aid to the *contras*.

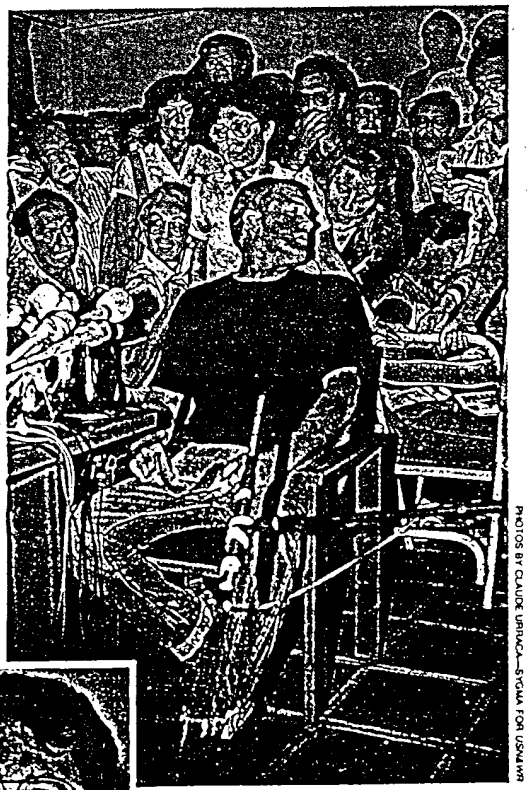
The administration's response: No way. "It might not smell very nice," said one senior aide, "but I'm sure it will all turn out to be legal."

By the time the trial was under way, the point was moot. President Reagan on October 24 signed an order providing $100 million in aid approved by Congress, $70 million of it military aid that could include use of U.S. advisers to train the *contras*.

"I'm guilty of everything..."

Hasenfus, 45, whose family lives in Marinette, Wis., faces up to 30 years' imprisonment if convicted by a People's Anti-Somocista Tribunal of terrorism, illicit association and disrupting public security. He pleaded innocent to the charges on October 23 after earlier telling interviewers, "I'm guilty of everything they've charged." Sandinistas told *U.S. News & World Report* that once his case ended Hasenfus could be returned to the U.S. "within a few months."

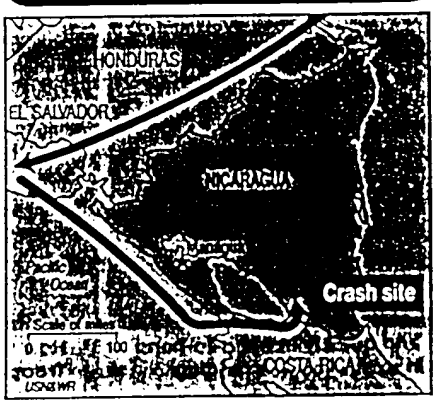
As the trial plays out, what is emerging are only allegations—no proof—of indirect White House assistance that enabled both humanitarian assistance and weapons to reach the *contras*. After seeing classified reports, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), vice chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, said he had "substantial questions" about the "indirect" involvement of U.S. officials.



PHOTOS BY CLAUDE URRACA—SYGMA FOR USN&WR

The captured mercenary at trial staged by President Ortega, left. The American's claims, and leaks in Washington, spotlight a shadowy supply chain that supporters would rather see overlooked

ROUTE TO DISASTER



Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigators were gathering evidence for review in January. A General Accounting Office investigation, *USN&WR* learned, found some past humanitarian aid had been converted to buy military equipment. Congress in 1984 forbade use of U.S. funds to support "directly or indirectly military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua by any nation, group, organization, movement or individual."

Mum's the word

Whatever the extent of administration assistance behind the scenes, the White House clearly meant to keep its role quiet. One participant in White House meetings said officials avoided a "paper trail" and never mentioned lethal aid. Assistance apparently reached the *contras* through private groups, including the World Anti-Communist League, the Alabama-based Civilian Military Assistance group and the Florida-based Air Commandos Association. All have denied participating in arms shipments.

Financing is similarly hard to trace. One apparent source: Saudi Arabia, as a gesture of gratitude for the U.S. sale of AWACS reconnaissance planes in 1981.

Beyond stirring controversy in the U.S., Hasenfus's allegations complicated U.S. relations with El Salvador and Honduras. Both nations have publicly denied aiding the *contras* while privately backing the U.S. effort. Salvadoran President José Napoleón Duarte suffered special embarrassment, denying that a Salvadoran base was used to supply the *contras* only to learn his own military had lied about its involvement.

While governments bob and weave, the explosion of a land mine in Nicaragua refocused attention on the mounting costs of civil war. Six civilians died, and 30 were wounded. Residents near the blast blamed the *contras*. Curiously, the incident failed to increase Sandinista anger at the man first labeled the "Rambo Hasenfus."

"There is no demand for blood here," says Alejandro Bendaña, a top official in the Foreign Ministry. "You've got to pity the guy." ■

by Stewart Powell, with Carla Anne Robbins in Managua and Steven Emerson and Dennis Mullin in Washington

SPECIAL FORCES
CAN THEY DO THE JOB?

■ Iran, 1980: A hastily assembled U.S. task force attempts to rescue American hostages held in Iran. The affair ends in failure and death at Desert One.

Beirut, 1983: Nearly 250 U.S. servicemen die when a fanatic drives a bomb-loaded truck into a Marine barracks. In the aftermath, questions are raised about security—and whether the regular military ignored warnings from a special-operations unit.

Malta, 1985: Three transport planes break down, preventing a Delta Force team from arriving on the scene during the hijacking of an Egyptian airliner.

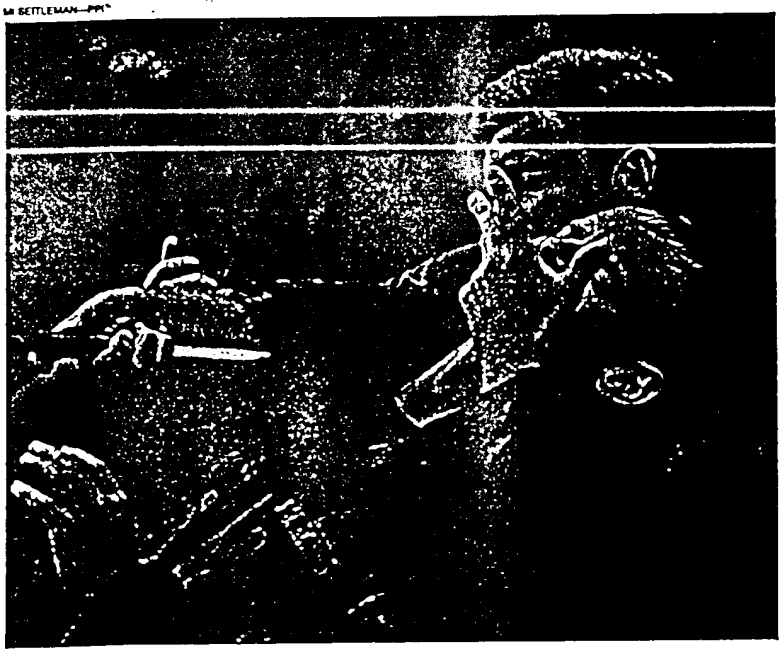
The list is a military critic's dream—and a Pentagon planner's nightmare. In an age when nuclear war seems unthinkable and major conventional warfare only marginally less so, the most immediate military threat facing the U.S. may not be arms control but rather "low-intensity conflict"—Pentagon jargon covering everything from terrorist acts and hostage takings to counter-insurgency. "Low-intensity conflict is the prime challenge we will face, at least through the remainder of this century," insists Secretary of State George Shultz. "The future of peace and freedom may well depend on how effectively we meet it."

Terrorism and "low-intensity conflicts" pose the most immediate challenge to U.S. military planners and put a heavy burden on America's elite combat units trained to fight a new kind of war

So far, the omens are not good—at least according to a growing list of critics. At the center of the controversy are America's Special Operations Forces (SOF), the elite units such as Delta Force, the Navy SEALS and the Army Rangers, whose mission is to counter today's unconventional military threats. Few challenge their dedication to duty or the quality of their training. Even so, says Senator William Cohen (R-Me.), "the United States is ill-equipped to deal with the problems of terrorism and guerrilla warfare." The Defense Department itself has given credence to the complaints. "As a nation, we do not understand low-intensity conflict," said a Pentagon task force in an internal report made public late last month. "We execute our activities poorly, and we lack the ability to sustain operations."

Despite the report, top Pentagon officials maintain that the overall record of the SOF is better than critics think. In the 1983 Grenada invasion, for example, some military analysts argue that an SOF plan was blended into a conventional-forces strategy, resulting in poor planning and clumsy coordination. But the invasion did achieve its purpose, freeing American students and bringing down a radical regime that was hostile to U.S. interests. Hijackings and terror, meanwhile, raise sovereignty issues: Foreign governments, sensitive to charges of American meddling in volatile regions, are simply reluctant to allow the U.S. to station

SETTLEMAN—PPI

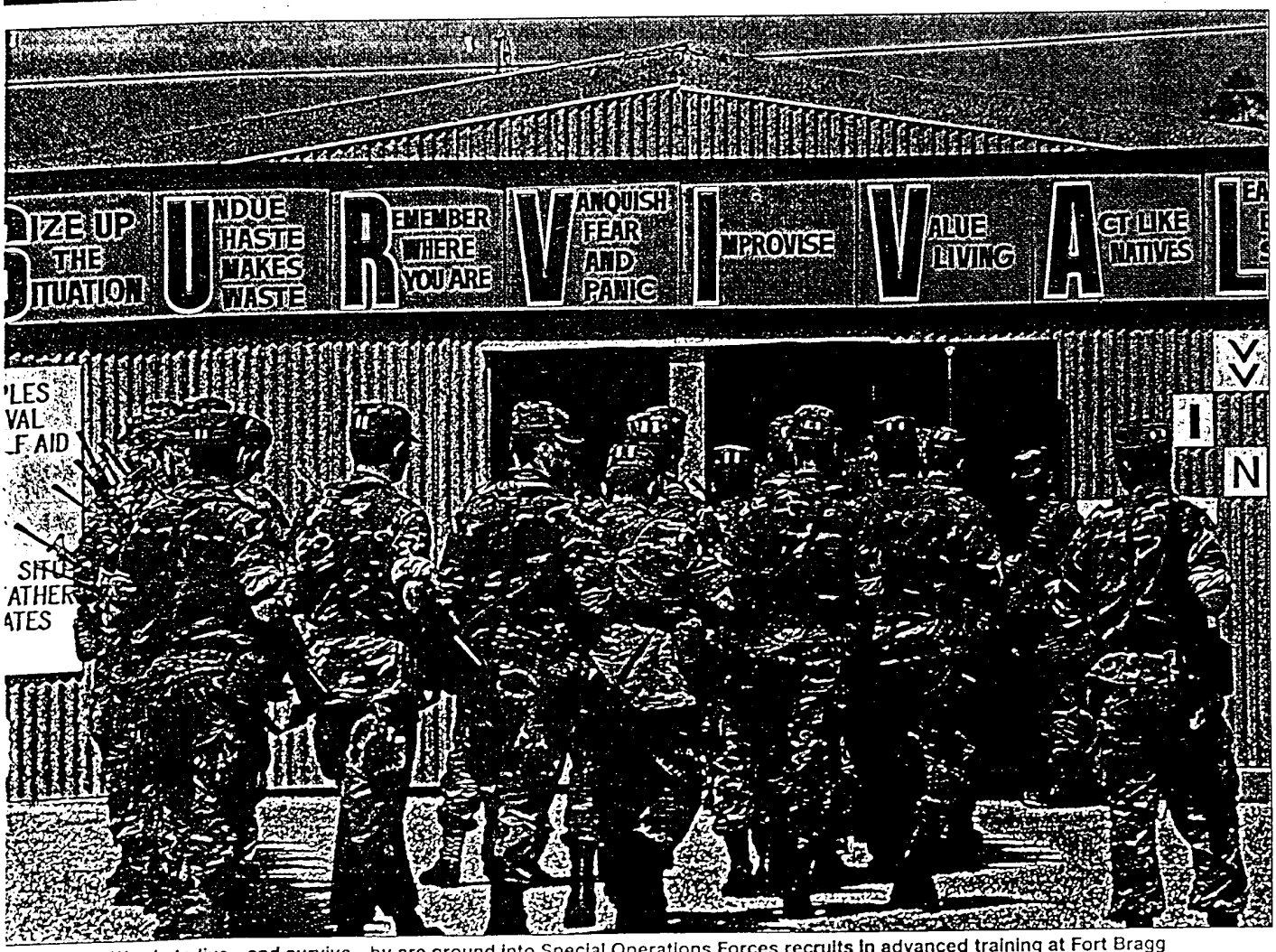


Special Forces training: How to kill silently and quickly in hand-to-hand combat. U.S. commandos hone their skills in exotic locales ranging from the jungles of Panama, seen here, to the Arctic tundra

GARY L. KIEFFER—USN&WR

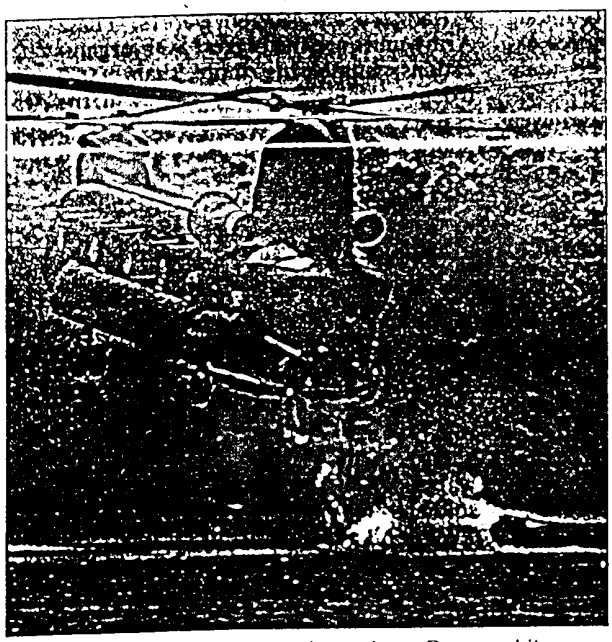
How to secure a landing zone in enemy territory: Troops like these training at Fort Bragg, N.C., guarded a captured airport in the Grenada invasion

AMERICA'S ELITE TROOPS



M. SEITELMAN—PPI

Words to live—and survive—by are ground into Special Operations Forces recruits in advanced training at Fort Bragg



How to infiltrate enemy territory: Army Rangers hit the water from a moving CH-47 Chinook transport helicopter and swim to a waiting rubber raft

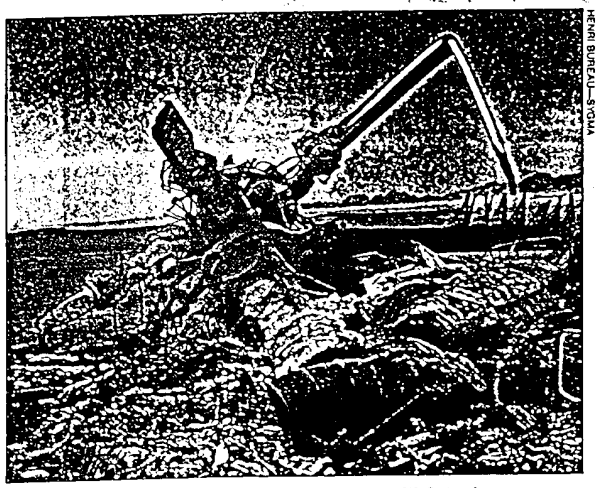
VOLLENWEIDER—SIPA/SPECIAL FEATURES

How to take care of an injured buddy: Bringing back the wounded is part of the credo of Special Operations Forces such as these recruits training in San Diego to become elite Navy SEALS

counterterrorist units on their soil, close to likely scenes of conflict.

Congress takes action

No one disagrees that the SOF should be the vanguard of America's effort to fight terrorism and wage low-intensity warfare. The question is how to get there from here. Recently, the Pentagon has pushed to improve the SOF—and, by all accounts, readiness levels are beginning to perk up. But proponents of Special Forces insist more is needed. In the closing hours of the legislative session in mid-October, Congress passed an SOF reform package sponsored by Maine's Cohen and Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.). The bill would deflect criticism that the SOF is fragmented and unwieldy by creating a unified SOF command across service boundaries under a four-star general who would report directly to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The legislation also would establish an office of assistant defense secretary for low-intensity conflicts and an advisory board on Special Forces for the President's National Security Council.



HENRI BUREAU—SYGMA

Desert One: Wreckage of the ill-fated 1980 Iran hostage-rescue mission

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Samuel Wilson, a father of the SOF who helped to broker the legislation, predicts that controversy will now subside if the Pentagon and White House appoint strong leaders to run the Special Forces. That's the "crucial next move," he says.

Senior military officers, who have resisted a unified command, still worry that such reforms may cause more frictions and turf battles among the services. They note that theater commanders—four-stars themselves—still will supervise an SOF command when it's deployed abroad unless the President or Defense Secretary orders otherwise. Some also argue that a separate command structure for elite forces runs counter to U.S. military tradition—and could have an impact on operations in the field when the SOF bangs up against the conventional structure.

The idea of commandos and other special forces fighting unconventional war has a history going back at least to the fall of Troy. Even the American Revolutionary War had its special operations in the form of a small band led by Francis Marion, the South Carolina "Swamp Fox," that sabotaged British supply lines. Today's SOF traces its roots to the derring-do of World War II outfits such as Merrill's Marauders, which harassed the Japanese in Burma. Still, it wasn't until the time of the Korean War that the U.S. military formally set up elite combat units. More than 3,700 SOF fighters served in the Vietnam War at its peak, when the Green Berets played key roles in guerrilla warfare and were embraced by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson as well as by John Wayne in the movies.

SOF strength shriveled after Vietnam as its budget was slashed 95 percent, but it resumed growing with the increasing threat of terrorism and brushfire wars. Today the forces total a record-high 15,000—some 9,300 in the Army, 4,000 in the Air Force and 1,700 in the Navy. Most of the fighters are recruited from the ranks of experienced regular servicemen, although the Navy SEALS recently began signing up new recruits among civilians in order to meet expansion demands. The main players—

• **Delta Force.** The Army refuses even to acknowledge that this unit exists. "The only Delta we know," goes the standard reply, "is the airline." Formed in 1980, this squadron of 80 to 100 "shooters" and more than 150 logistical and support troops was designed to counter terror attacks on Americans anywhere in the world—including inside the U.S.

Delta soldiers are drawn mainly from the ranks of the Army's top-notch Rangers and Green Berets in a process so select that only 1 in 20 of these already highly trained men qualifies. They undergo continual training that includes jumping blindfolded from planes and storming buildings or aircraft in rescue missions. They practice with live ammunition and make some of their own equipment, such as silencers for machine guns.

A Delta contingent led the ill-fated Iranian hostage-rescue mission and took part in the Grenada invasion. Delta's members have been quietly deployed to protect U.S. ambassadors from Lebanon to Central America and helped guard Pope John Paul II on a 1983 visit to Latin America. During the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Delta was part of a $1 billion Army security operation.

PETE DINE—STERN

West Germany's GSG-9 troops practice crashing

The Delta Force is based at a tightly restricted installation next to North Carolina's sprawling Fort Bragg, but some in the military and in Congress would like to find a way to station commandos in Europe, where many terror attacks against Americans occur, if resistance of host countries can be overcome.

• **Rangers and Green Berets.** These Army units are the biggest SOF organizations, numbering more than 9,000 troops stationed at seven bases in the U.S. as well as in West Germany, Japan, South Korea and Panama. Their mission is the small war, ranging from conducting quick surgical strikes such as the one in Grenada to providing Green Beret teams to train foreigners as insurgents fighting behind enemy lines. Teams also have been dispatched to seven friendly countries so far this year to train regular forces in counterinsurgency techniques.

As part of their 19-week training, these fighters parachute at night into the Uwharrie Forest near Fort Bragg and survive the rigors of mock guerrilla war for three weeks. Barely half the soldiers who apply make the grade. "We don't turn out thrill seekers," declares Brig. Gen. James Guest, commander of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg.

About 600 elite foreign troops—including some from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Thailand, the Philip-

into a terrorist stronghold to rescue hostages

pines, Somalia and El Salvador—also have trained at the JFK Center.

• **Task Force 160.** Known as the Night Stalkers, members of this secret Army aviation unit at Fort Campbell, Ky., are charged with getting the Delta Force, Rangers and Green Berets into action. They pilot Black Hawk, Hughes 500MD, Chinook and other helicopters, many of them outfitted with infrared night-vision equipment.

The unit's record has been tainted in the past four years by a series of crashes. In 1983 alone, TF-160 had 17 deaths in five major mishaps—half the entire Army's air crashes. One reason for the accidents is the daring aerial maneuvers performed by the pilots. In one crash, a helicopter flying so low it was almost skimming the treetops hit a power line. TF 160 [illegible] damn rotary-wing pilots in the world," claims Col. Andy Dulma, an SOF spokesman.

• **SEALS.** Descendants of the famous frogmen underwater demolition teams of World War II, the Navy's 1,700 SEALS (Sea-Air-Land [illegible]) are considered among the toughest Special Forces. They train for a full year in hand-to-hand combat, underwater demolition, parachuting, wilderness survival and scuba diving. [illegible] the elites is a special 175-man unit called SEAL Team 6, stationed at [illegible], Va., and geared for counterterrorist action.

• **First Special Operations Wing.** The Air Force's SOF unit, composed of some 5,000 men including reservists, is based at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. It was this unit [illegible] the first Army Rangers into Grenada. The wing uses specially [illegible] fixed-wing transports and helicopters capable of sneaking into enemy territory under-

neath radar coverage even in zero-visibility weather.

Intelligence sources report Army units have been detailed to the Central Intelligence Agency to train Nicaraguan *contra* rebels and other anti-Soviet guerrillas. Some classified Army teams have engaged in electronic bugging of Soviet officials in the U.S. and a Libyan airline office in Germany. An outfit called the Intelligence Support Activity (ISA)—supposedly disbanded but actually still in operation—recruits its own network of operatives in foreign lands.

Except for the Iran mission and Grenada, none of the special units has seen any action since Vietnam. In early 1985, some 63 percent of Army SOF units were rated unready or marginally ready for action. Today, thanks to an infusion of trained men and new equipment, all are graded ready to fight. Yet Senator Cohen contends: "It has been six years since the tragedy in the deserts of Iran, and the U.S. still doesn't have the capability to perform such a mission."

General Wilson worries that reduction of helicopter capability has actually moved the country backward since Iran. "In terms of projecting power, we have regressed," he says.

Allies excel

In contrast are spectacular successes scored by similar crack units of America's allies. Britain's Special Air Service (SAS) staged behind-enemy-lines surprise raids on larger forces during the 1982 Falklands War and in 1980 stormed the Iranian Embassy in London, rescuing 19 hostages. In a lightning 7-minute raid, West Germany's GSG-9 commandos saved 87 hostages from a Lufthansa airliner hijacked by Palestinians to Somalia in 1977. So successful was Israel's 1976 raid on Uganda's Entebbe Airport to rescue airline passengers hijacked by German terrorists that it inspired three movies.

The Soviet Union has its own SOF unit, *Spetznaz*, which is primarily geared for conducting strategic sabotage, terrorism and assassination behind enemy lines in time of war. *Spetznaz* units are believed responsible for killing President Hafizullah Amin of Afghanistan and his family during the Soviet-backed coup in December, 1979. Since then, *Spetznaz* troopers have been honing their skills in ideal laboratory conditions—the Afghan battlefields.

However suspect the performance of U.S. Special Operations Forces, few fault the tough breed of fighters who have survived torturous training to earn their distinctive uniforms. Backers argue that the real problem lies with a high command that does not appreciate

Fly quiet, listen sharp

Special tools for special jobs

It's the stuff of James Bond fantasies: Motorized parachutes, mine-detecting dolphins, electronic eavesdropping devices and minisubmarines. Life imitates art in the Special Forces, which use all those devices and more.

Army specialists at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, N.C., are testing a new generation of sophisticated sensors that can hear, smell, see and weigh people and objects from as far as 3 miles away. Electronic devices no larger than cigarette packs can pick up conversations inside a windowless building—or a hijacked airliner—half a mile off. Seismic sensors can pick up the roll of a tire or tank tread and differentiate animals from humans—even identifying the presence of a man on a horse.

In jungle terrain, infrared sensors can detect and display outlines of nearby humans, animals and even vehicles by measuring the heat they radiate.

"Stealth parachutes" can be steered for up to 25 miles from the jump point. The ParaPlane, a three-wheeled cart powered by a pair of small engines, carries a parachute inflated by propellers that can thrust the craft as high as 10,000 feet.

The MC-130E Combat Talon transport plane can slip into enemy territory at a 200-foot altitude to rescue people on the ground or at sea by snatching them aboard in a special harness attached to a line held aloft by helium balloons.

A $30 million tilt-rotor aircraft being developed—called the Osprey—takes off like a helicopter and flies like a plane, reaching speeds of 400 mph. High-powered minisubmarines known as Swimmer Delivery Vehicles (SDV's) can be launched from ships or submarines for reconnaissance missions, clandestine coastal landings or to fire specially designed torpedoes at enemy ships. New scuba gear used by Navy SEALS leaves no telltale bubbles in the water.

By far the most unlikely of the offbeat weapons are the dolphins, seals, sea lions and whales trained by the Navy to detect mines, recover torpedoes and attach cables. In one test conducted this year, some sea lions retrieved antisubmarine rockets in water as deep as 750 feet. Could sea beasts be used to attach explosives to enemy ships? "No comment," said a Navy official.

by Steven Emerson

Elite units say this time they'll be ready

Rescue: How U.S. would free hostages seized by terrorists

How would the U.S. mount a raid to free American hostages abducted by terrorists in an unfriendly country? After consulting military and terrorism experts, *U.S. News & World Report* has constructed a likely rescue operation:

Fifteen Americans are touring a Middle East country. Suddenly, five terrorists armed with machine guns and grenades commandeer the tour bus (1) and take the passengers to an abandoned three-story building (2) in a nearby city on the coast. The terrorists kill one American and throw his body out of a window. They demand the release within 72 hours of 22 convicted terrorists imprisoned in other countries. If the demand isn't met, the terrorists say, they will execute a hostage every half hour. U.S. officials, hoping to buy time, declare their readiness to negotiate, but they actually have ruled out making any deal with the kidnappers. That leaves only one option—a rescue. But the operation is complicated by the possibility of hostile military reaction by the country in which the terrorists are based. The Pentagon and CIA activate local intelligence operatives (3), who relay critical information, such as the number of terrorists seen in the building and the dimensions and locations of windows and doors.

A naval task force led by an aircraft carrier sails to an area (4) 20 miles off the coast where the hostages are held. Delta Force members, Rangers, Task Force 160 pilots and specially equipped helicopters are transported to the carrier.

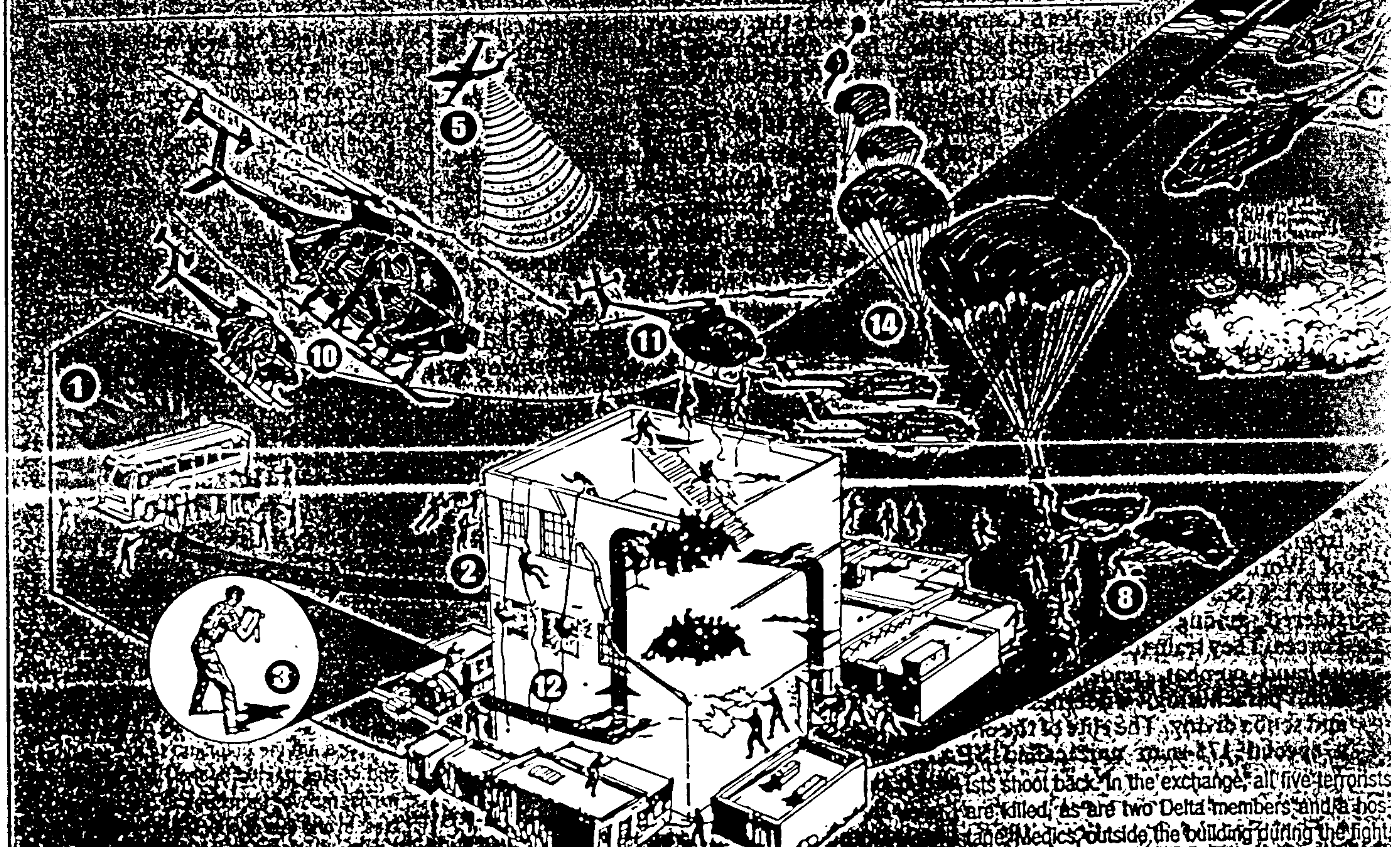
A Beechcraft 200 surveillance plane (5), outfitted with advanced electronic-detection equipment, circles 5 miles above the terrorists' building. Its mission: Pick up any radio transmissions sent between the terrorists and possible collaborators on the outside.

F-14 interceptors fly from the carrier (6) to protect the task force and the rescue operation from hostile air attack.

Air-dropped at night (7) by a C-130 transport plane, a team of Rangers glides 5 miles with "stealth parachutes" and lands within a mile of the terrorist site.

Landing Rangers (8) surround the building. Black Hawks and HH-53 helicopters (9) ferry medics and more Rangers from the task force.

Delta Force members in carrier-based Hughes 500MD helicopters (10), equipped with infrared domes, skids and silenced tail rotors, head for the terrorists.



(11) Delta Force members use ropes to descend silently from the hovering helicopters to the roof of the building where the American hostages are being held. [illegible]

Using ropes to scale down the side of the building (12), the roof-based Delta troops crash through the windows. At the same time, the [illegible] ground-based forces blast through the doors. Once inside, Delta fighters surprise and confuse the terrorists by throwing stun grenades and firing their machine guns at anyone who moves. Some terror[illegible]ists shoot back. In the exchange, all five terrorists are killed, as are two Delta members and a hostage. Medics outside the building during the fight enter and tend the wounded. [illegible] Air Force gunship (13) hovers above city firing on hostile troops from the host country. [illegible]

The freed hostages, Delta Force members and Rangers are evacuated from the building by HH-53 helicopters (14) that fly them back to the waiting aircraft carrier. [illegible]

their mission. Says one senior Special Forces officer who recently retired, "We've had the best-trained soldiers for 30 years, but somehow the generals and admirals pretend we don't exist."

Pentagon brass deny that accusation and say they're working to streamline the Special Forces and expand their role while keeping them in the regular chain of command. Yet Adm. William Crowe, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (see interview on page 47), admits that defining the role of the SOF is like the fable about blind men groping around an elephant—"whatever part you feel, that's what it's all about." He told a congressional hearing: "We're still learning a great deal about Special Operations Forces. This is a sort of new item for us."

Both sides in the dispute acknowledge a longstanding antipathy toward the SOF by the traditional services. One top Army officer ascribes the hostility to a lingering image of the SOF's "Rambo mentality—the sun shades, the Rolex watches." He recalls: "In Vietnam, some of these guys were living in lush camps in the mountains with TV, hot and cold running water and choppers delivering beer and steak. The rest of the Army became quite angry and decided to get rid of them when they got the chance. They got the chance after Vietnam."

In a move that some suspect reflected the regular services' disdain for unorthodox units, the Army in late 1983 launched a massive investigation into how hundreds of millions of dollars were spent by intelligence units created in the wake of the failed Iran rescue mission. A two-year Justice Department probe produced just one conviction for improper use of a $796 airline ticket.

Among several "black" or clandestine military operations cut back was one called Seaspray. Controlled by the Army but working with the CIA, this 55-man unit used aircraft to eavesdrop on radio messages between guerrillas in El Salvador and Sandinista troops in Nicaragua. After the finances probe, Seaspray was reduced in size and severed from the CIA.

Said one retired general: "The Army used the allegations of financial irregularities as a means of dismantling special operations." But Lt. Col. John Myers, spokesman for the Military District of Washington, replied: "When the Army is made aware of misconduct, the Army is required by law to take appropriate action and let the chips fall where they may."

Some SOF personnel complain of barriers to promotion. "Special operations are not career enhancing," says a senior SOF officer. "If you stay in more than two tours, you go nowhere." Admiral Crowe replies: "Where Special Forces officers have performed well, their promotion rate has been equal to and in most cases higher than their counterparts in conventional forces." Other Pentagon officials, meanwhile, say many SOF officers slow their advancement by refusing to leave their units.

Soldiers trained for swift action report finding themselves slogging through paper work. "I love this mission," said a master sergeant who is quitting after nine years in the SOF. "But I won't take it any more. I've filled out my last meaningless form, and I've painted my last dumpster."

Who's in charge here?

Compounding the problem, say Special Forces officers, is that, until Congress acted, there has been a lack of a unified SOF command. They note that the successful foreign units have a "stovepipe" command structure in which orders come directly from the defense ministers. In Britain, for example, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has personally participated in command-and-control exercises to keep current on the capabilities of the SAS.

Until the reorganization plan approved by Congress goes into effect, the Delta Force and SEAL Team 6 fall under the Joint Special Operations Command while the Rangers and Green Berets are controlled by the Army's First Special Operations Command. Though both commands are based at Fort Bragg, they are in different buildings and only rarely coordinate planning or training.

"If the President calls and says, 'Go fix this problem,' you've got to be able to pick up the phone and call the unit that will fix the problem," says a retired Army general. "You can't go through three other organizations, because 93 people will know you've got this mission. All of them will insist on a briefing, and all will find a reason why they have to be involved. Suddenly, the entire Army is going to solve this problem that three PFC's in a pickup truck were going to handle."

Writer Arthur Hadley noted in *The Straw Giant,* his book on the American military, that the hastily formed Iran rescue team didn't even have common radio frequencies and wound up using poorly maintained Navy helicopters flown by inadequately briefed Marine pilots.

Yet so ingrained in the American psyche is the distrust of secret military units that efforts to beef them up have been met with alarm in some quarters. Critics warn that SOF troops operating

as advisers abroad, either fighting or aiding insurgents, might drag the U.S. into another Vietnam War.

The SOF's proponents argue that the massive military establishment tends to ignore the small units in favor of concentrating on the big picture—how to deter nuclear conflict or turn away massed Soviet tanks on the plains of Europe. Total outlays for the SOF add up to only 1 percent of Defense Department spending. "An institution that consumes billions does not want to hear about low-budget solutions to some of their problems," says former Pentagon official Noel Koch, who had jurisdiction over the SOF.

One glaring flaw cited by partisans of the elite units: Airlift capability for Special Forces is 59th on the Military Airlift Command's list of priorities. One study shows the military's ability to airlift its highly trained fighters today is no better than it was in 1980, when aircraft failures contributed to the Iran rescue fiasco.

Chairman Dan Daniel (D-Va.) of the House Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee said during debate over the reforms that U.S. armed forces "for the last 40 years have concentrated on deterring nuclear conflict and the 'big war' on the plains of Europe. . . . We are well prepared for the least likely conflicts and poorly prepared for the most likely."

Cash transfusion

Acutely aware of such misgivings, the Reagan administration has quadrupled SOF spending since 1981 to $1.6 billion. Some $12 billion more will be sought to reinvigorate the crack outfits over the next five years. The Air Force intends to spend $3.3 billion on special operations over six years to replace aging helicopters, increase the fleet of Combat Talon transport planes to 35 from the current 14 and add 10 refueling planes.

The new reform package almost surely will improve SOF clout in the military and within the Reagan White House. "Special Forces have come a long way under this administration," says Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy Seth Cropsey. "What cannot be argued is that the U.S. needs a strong special-operations capability today the way an eagle needs its talons."

Many critics have not been impressed. "Ten days late and $100 short" is how one Senate aide described the Pentagon's reforms prior to the recent congressional legislation.

How long it will take to finish the overhaul of America's Special Forces ordered by Congress remains an open question. But time is critical: If proponents and skeptics of Special Forces agree on anything, it's that the new battlefields—the tarmacs of troubled airports, the random violence of terrorism, the continuing U.S.-Soviet conflicts by proxy everywhere from Central America to Angola—will not turn quiet anytime soon. ■

Would an SOF plan have saved American lives in Grenada?

CHUCK HARRITY—USN&WR

What went wrong on Grenada?

by Robert A. Manning and Steven Emerson with Robert Kaylor

Nearly three years after the U.S. invasion of Grenada, new and troubling details about the fight for the Caribbean island are still emerging.

Special Operations Forces once were to play the major ground role in "Urgent Fury," a multiservice operation hastily launched on Oct. 25, 1983, to neutralize Cuban troops and rescue American medical students believed to be in danger from a new radical regime that had seized power. The Marine Corps was assigned a supportive role. But *U.S.News & World Report* has learned that, at the last minute, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave the Marines responsibility for taking the northern half of the island.

Said Gen. E. C. Meyer, former Army Chief of Staff: "A lot of things went wrong at Grenada because the Special Forces plan was overlaid by the conventional-forces plan."

The Special Forces planned a 2 a.m. landing. Under conventional command, the invasion was changed to 5:27 a.m. in the erroneous belief that the Marine pilots were not trained to land at night. "For years, the Rangers have practiced to accomplish airfield seizures at night, using our night-vision devices to exploit enemy weaknesses," says a classified Pentagon report compiled later. "Daylight attacks by the Rangers give up this considerable advantage to the enemy."

In the daybreak invasion, 19 U.S. soldiers were killed, seven of them by friendly fire and accidents.

Poor communications in the invasion were "the single most glaring deficiency of the entire operation," defense officials told a closed-door House hearing this year. Because of incompatible equipment and technology, there was virtually no contact between Rangers and Army airborne troops on the island and the naval task force offshore. "Every time a ship would turn, communication was lost until the antennas could be manually adjusted," the report said.

Lack of accurate intelligence about Cuban troop strength on the island was another shortcoming. Four days before the invasion, the Army tried to smuggle in a Central Intelligence Agency informant to spy and convert his island home into a safe house for advance U.S. troops. But the operative, a wealthy Grenadian landowner who had been away for some time, suddenly got cold feet and refused to go.

Intelligence sources say naval commanders also failed to use a secret Army unit that included two advanced Hughes 500MD helicopters with night-vision equipment, standing by on Barbados, that could have helped with reconnaissance missions and tried to rescue four Navy SEALS who drowned in a preinvasion operation.

In response to such criticisms, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said in a recent letter to the *New York Times:* "In both military and political terms, the operation on Grenada was a success. . . . There will always be some mistakes. We have never hidden these, but it would be more accurate and fair to judge the operation by its goal, which was to free 1,000 American citizens from a dangerous captivity and to free the island for a return from anarchy to democracy."

by Steven Emerson